# ZX Spectrum GAMER

ISSUE 2 • APR 2012



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MORE EXCITING THAN TED ROGERS IN A DRESS

# ZXSpec

# ZX Spectrum GAMER

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Hello again Specs and Specettes and welcome to the second issue of ZX Spectrum Gamer - the magazine that promises to never adhere to a regular release schedule. It would have been written sooner, but I was abducted by sentient coat-racks from another planet and didn't have enough money for a taxi.

Writing this issue opened my eyes to the wonders of Tau Ceti...a game that I'd never properly played until now. It's amazing that even after all these years, I can still come across a Speccy game that sucks me in and makes me want to go back and play long after I'm done reviewing it.

So I hope you enjoy the mag, and if you don't, I'll just insult you in issue 3 because you probably won't read it. Hopefully it will be out sometime before 2015.

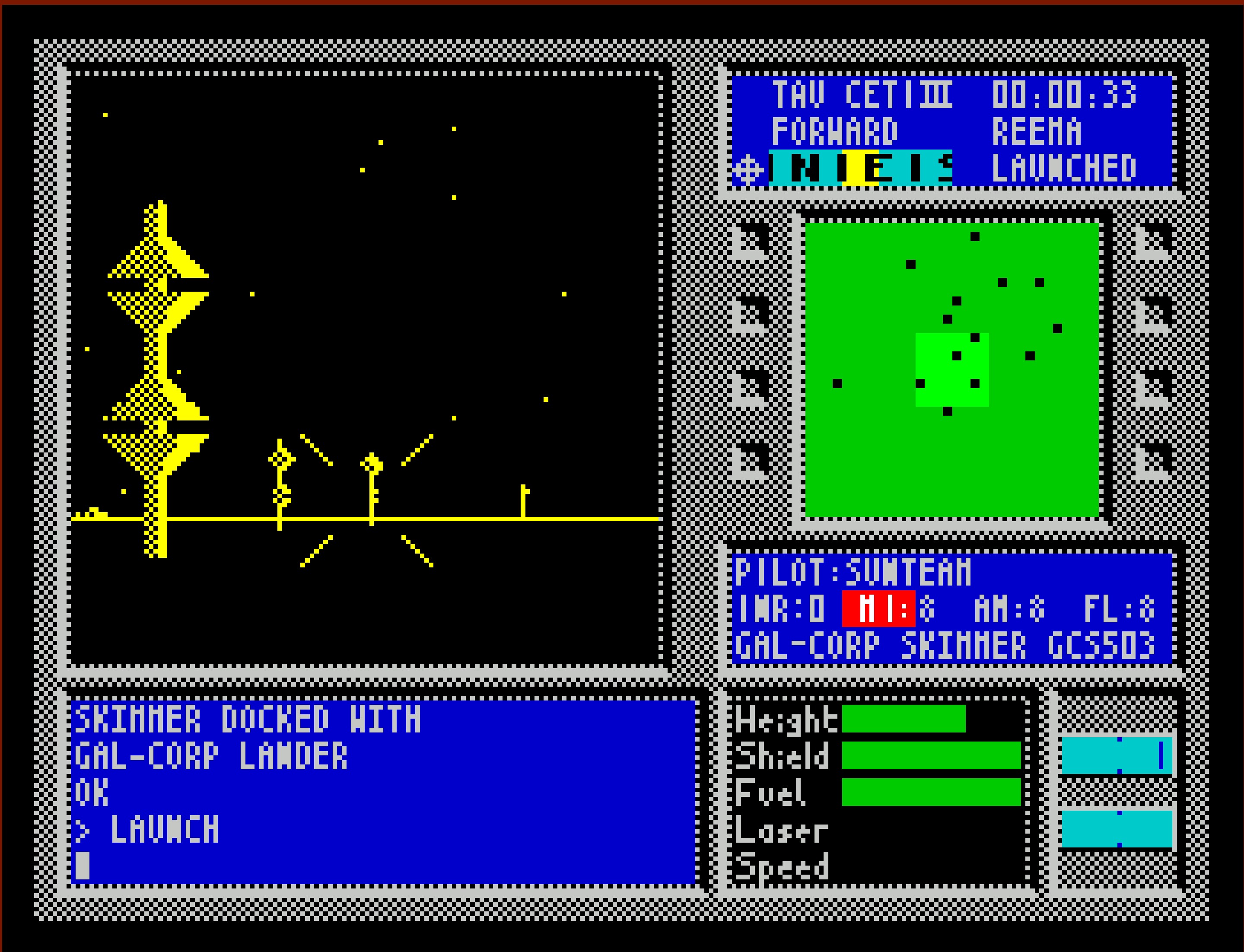
sunteam_paul

# TAU CETI

**PUBLISHER:** CRL • **YEAR:** 1985 / 1987 (Special Edition) • **MEMORY:** 48K / 128K

**Things** are wrong. Very wrong. After a plague swept across Tau Ceti III, the colonists decided to make a quick exit. And not before time, because two years later a meteor went and smashed into the planet. And if that wasn't bad enough, the robot maintenance systems have gone a bit mental and are flying around all over the place, shooting anything with skin. But of course, clueless as the human race is, they decide they want to go back.

Now, the easy thing to do would be to just nuke the place and start afresh, but some bean counter has decided that the existing buildings are quite valuable and it would be very nice if they weren't all destroyed thank you very much. So one man volunteers to take on the planet



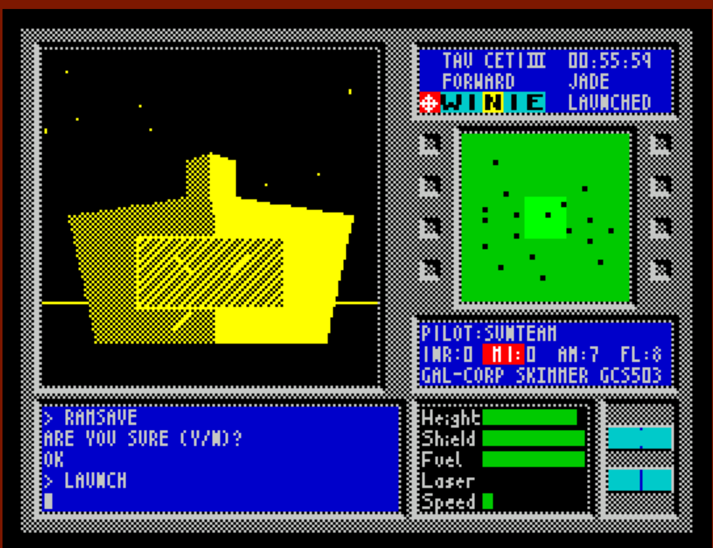

*The 3D graphics are fast and smooth, and you barely notice how small the play area is.*

in an armoured ground-skimmer, recover the rods to the main fusion reactor and shut it down, deactivating the robots in the process. And if you hadn't guessed already, that one man would happen to be you.



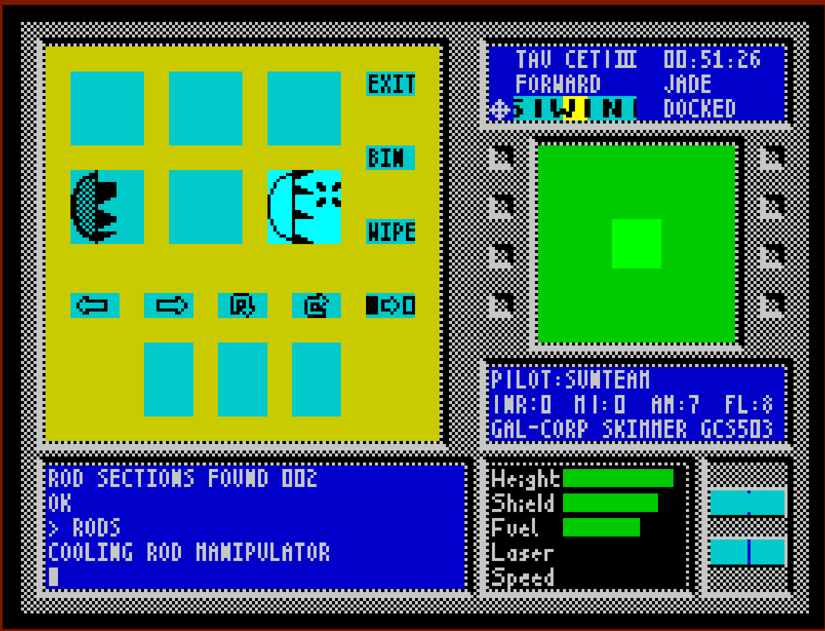

*Inside a reactor substation. If you're very lucky, you might find a cooling rod.*

As the game starts, you are docked in a lander module: a safe haven from the mechanical maniacs outside. In here, you use the keyboard to type out commands to the skimmer's computer - you can do many things such as refuel and rearm your ship, take a look at the planetary map and assemble the cooling rods you have found, in a kind of jigsaw-like mini puzzle game. There are many other structures on the planet you can also dock with, including military facilities, city libraries and other civilian buildings. While most of them allow you to repair your shields, the civilian ones do not hold weaponry.




*Docking with a structure is fairly easy, as long as you take it slow.*

But enough of the boring stuff. Type LAUNCH and the game proper begins. Here you get to fly around, shooting flying saucers with your laser guns and firing guided missiles at enemy structures. All very cool, but going around all guns blazing will lead to a premature and permanent death. Strategy is required to pick off your enemies, dock with other buildings and make your way to the nearest Jump Pad which will transport

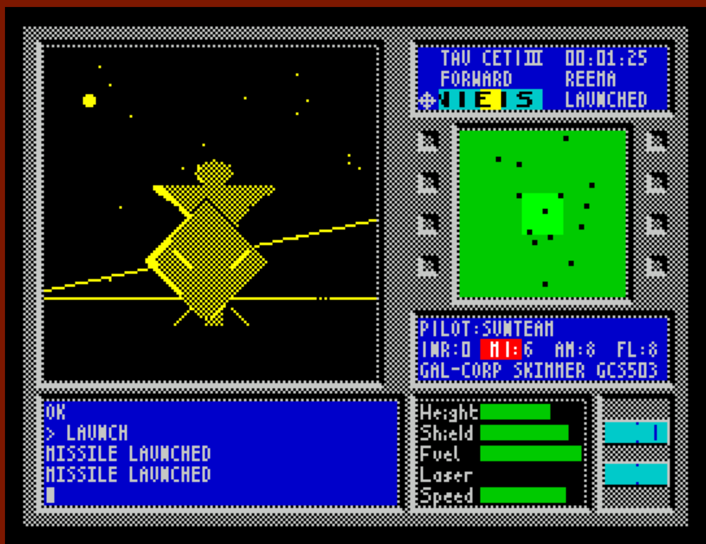



*The cooling rod mini-game allows you to move and rotate pieces until you get the right combination.*

you to a different city. Tau Ceti is not a straightforward blaster like, for example, 3D Starstrike. It's a game with depth and it just oozes atmosphere.

The graphics might look like an early attempt at solid 3D, but that's the beauty of them. Each structure is a simple shape, but is given form by some shadowing - something that is dynamic as it changes with the passing of each day. In fact, when night falls, there is so much shadow that it requires you to switch on your Infra-red view, which incidentally has a very cool and realistic after-image blurring effect to it.

At a distance, everything is quite indistinct. But rather than being a flaw, this actually works for the game. Each time you see something on the horizon, you aren't sure if it's just a tower, a crater or an enemy ship, so there is always a certain amount of tension when approaching - which is something

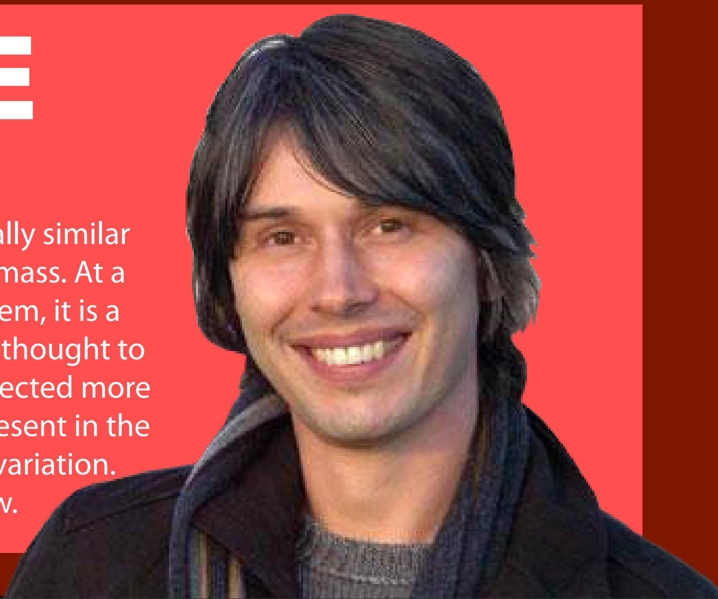


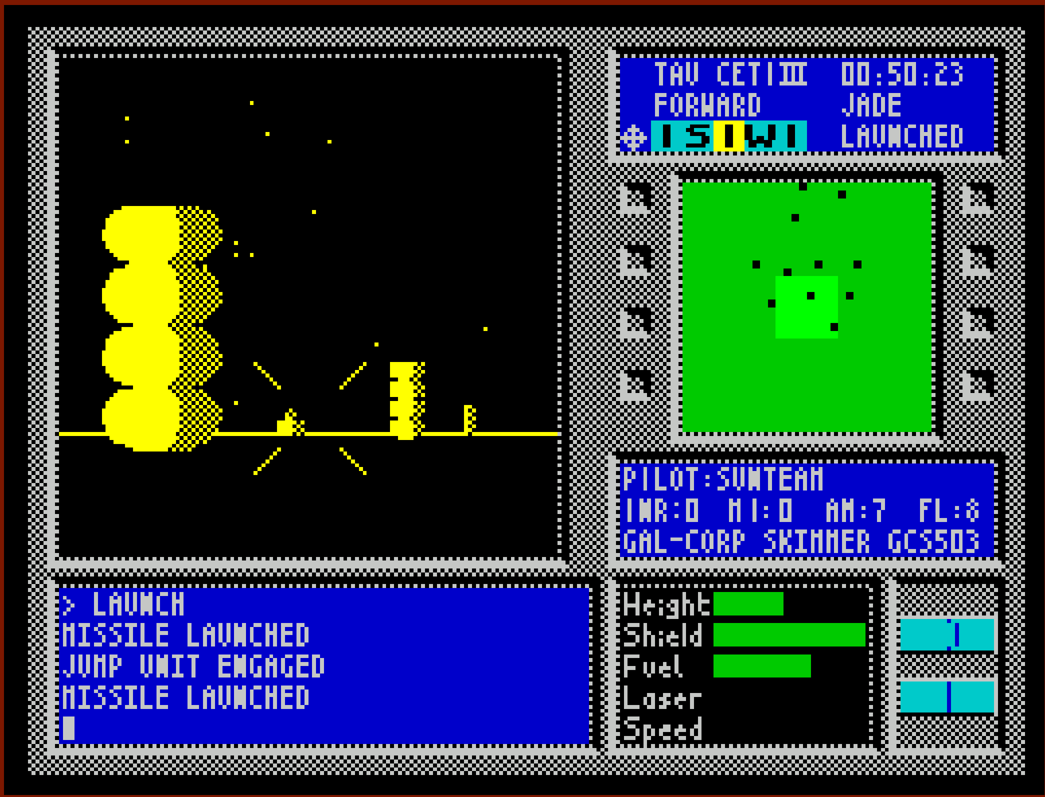

*Missiles away! Be wary, as some structures and craft can shoot them down before they hit home.*

# REAL SCIENCE

## with Dr Brian Cox

Tau Ceti is a star in the constellation Cetus that is spectrally similar to the Sun, although it has only about 78% of the Sun's mass. At a distance of just under 12 light-years from the Solar System, it is a relatively nearby star. Tau Ceti is metal-deficient and so is thought to be less likely to host rocky planets. Observations have detected more than ten times as much dust surrounding Tau Ceti as is present in the Solar System. The star appears stable, with little stellar variation. Ooohhhh. I think I need to change my pants now.

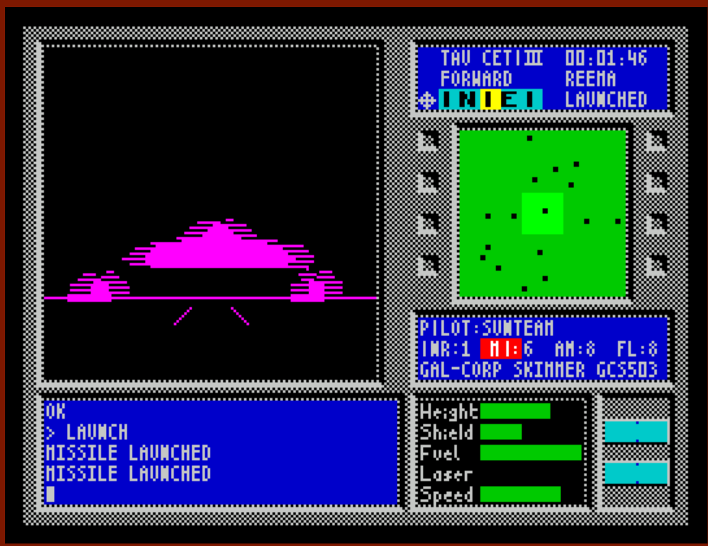





*In a city centre, any one of those dots could be hostile.*

best done at slow speeds. Although you have a height meter, combat is very simple with just left and right to worry about while you aim, and each enemy explodes in a satisfying shower of pixels, the flash briefly lighting up the ground below.

Tau Ceti is just one of those games that really immerses you. Your imagination fills in the blanks - and although the 128k Special Edition doesn't have music as you play, the soft, white noise sound effects actually enhance the experience quite well. It's a game that is best not to jump straight into. Read the manual first, take things slowly and before long you will be hooked. Still one of the Spectrum's classics. **SP**



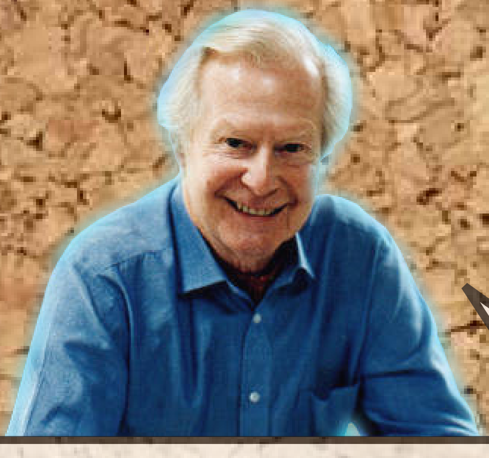

*The blurry night-vision mode is pretty cool.*




**VERDICT:** A truly immersive atmosphere makes this a classic.

# THE GALLERY

## featuring Tony Hart

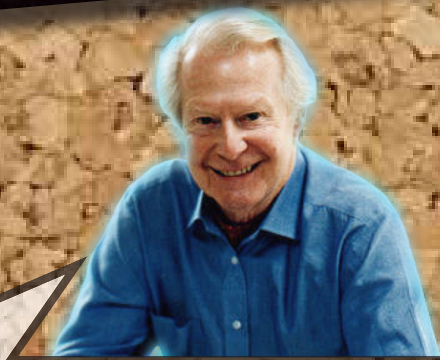


Jeremy from Scunthorpe has sent in this wonderful bit of art. This just goes to prove that space is a colourful, jolly place filled with wacky astronauts that drive around in clown-like rovers. I particularly like the pink rocket strapped onto the side. It reminds me of my priest. He's into black holes.



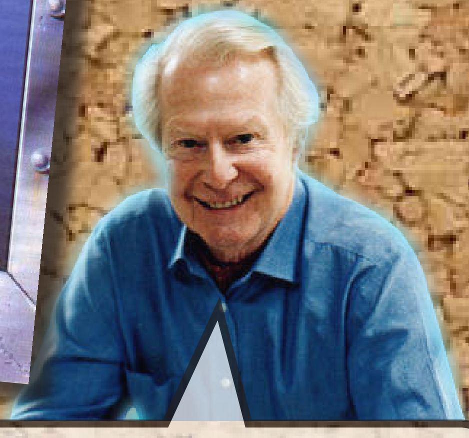






This was drawn by Thomas from Pontypridd. It's quite possibly the worst piece of artwork I have ever seen. In fact, when I opened the envelope, I almost vomited up my eyeballs!



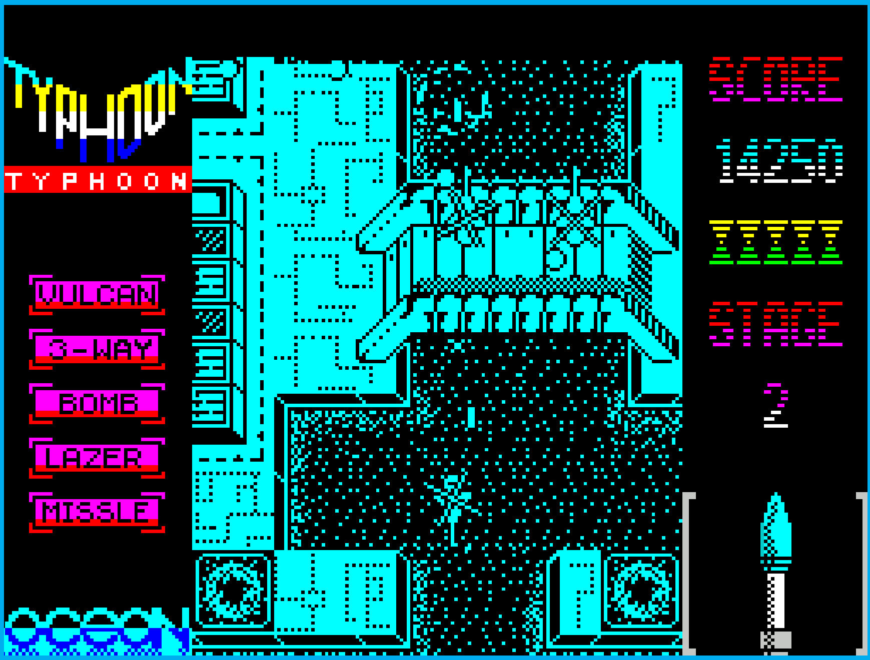



Many thanks to Mary from Hoo St. Werburgh who sent this in to me. It's a very exciting image of Derek Griffiths fighting off robot hordes from the future. While the airbrushing is perhaps a little overdone, the strong muscle definition, complete with virile throbbing veins and those robots, their glorious domed helmets glistening in the light of a distant star...well, it's enough to make my paintbrush bristle with delight. Now excuse me while I go and play with my Morph.

# TYPHOON

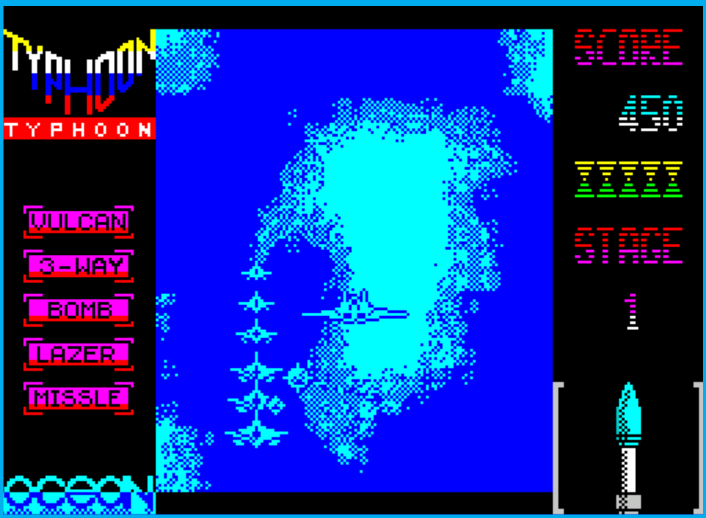
**PUBLISHER:** IMAGINE SOFTWARE LTD • **YEAR:** 1988 • **MEMORY:** 48K / 128K

**Typhoon** is one of those shooty games that are all too common, which is surprising as they aren't usually something the Speccy handles very well. They are usually clunky, hard to control and suffer from the inability to see whatever the hell the enemy is shooting at you. But I thought it only fair to give this one a go, despite its farty name.




*The detailed scenery is to be avoided - not because you crash into it, but because it makes things harder to see.*

Apparently, the Earth has been taken over by pesky aliens. Now I know that might sound too fantastic to believe, but there it is. Strangely, these aliens have chosen to attack the Earth in what looks like standard military issue aircraft and helicopters. I assume that the cost of intergalactic travel really hit their defence budget hard and they had to compromise.

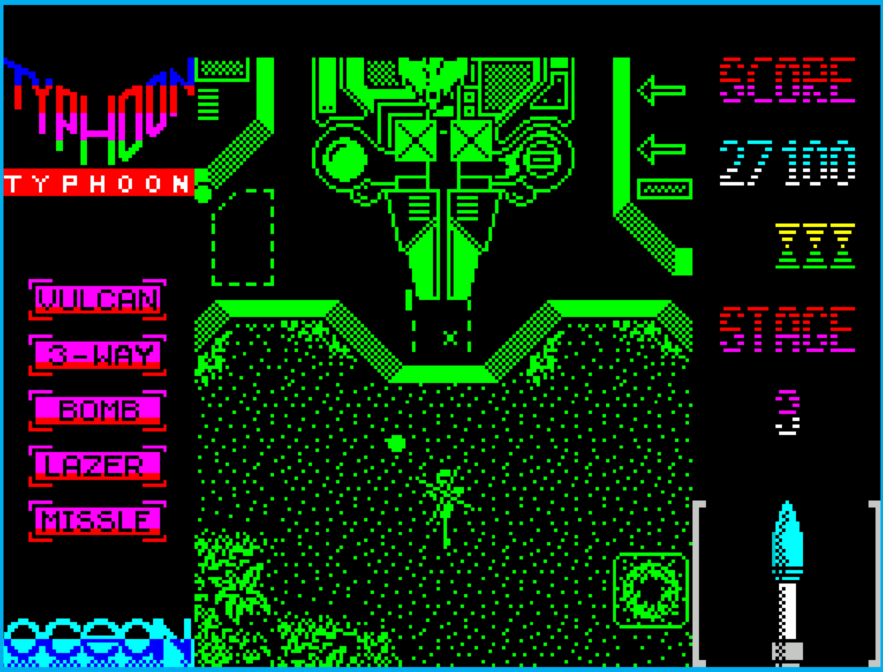



*The cloud effect works well enough to distract you from the poor collision detection.*

Anyway, the game starts off with a rather clever 'into-the-screen' flying section, where you pilot your F-14 in true Afterburner style through a bunch of clouds while blasting some oncoming mecha-aliens (planes). This is pulled off pretty well visually, and ends with a boss battle where you take on what looks like a distinctly un-alien like aircraft carrier.

After this visual taster, the game then decides to switch to bog-standard

up-the-screen shootie action, and you inexplicably are now piloting a helicopter. As with all good shoot 'em ups that torture your fingers, you can drop bombs as well as fire forward. This is kind of essential to know, as the enemy gun turrets have the audacity to fire at you in an attempt to ruin your evening. Of course, the end of each level contains a boss of some sort (usually the aggressive sort) which has to be dispatched to move on.



*Damn this boss. Damn it to hell and back with marshmallows up its nose and a red hot poker in its bottom (It's quite tricky).*

Typhoon suffers from some of the problems of monochrome shooters, although not nearly as bad as you might expect. The action can be a little tricky to follow (much like the plot of a David Lynch film) and you can wonder why you just exploded from time to time, but the bullets are big enough to minimise this problem.

## Other Windy Things

Typhoons are very windy. Here are some more things that are windy.

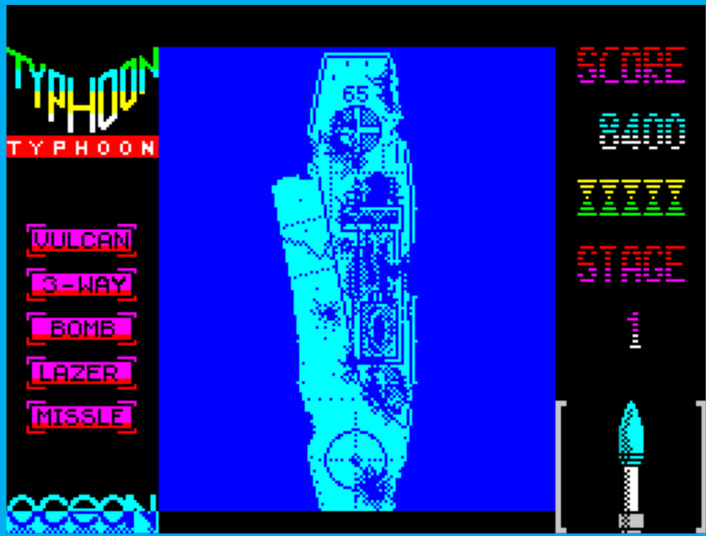


1. Windy Miller
A well known children's character, upon closer inspection, Windy Miller has a darker side. Well known for brewing cider, Windy is a drunkard who lives by himself on his solitary farm. His only friends are a cow and some chickens that he claims are used for milk and eggs. He's also a peddler of pseudo-scientific nonsense, believing that if he whistles, the wind will come. He asserts that touching a chimney sweep's collar brings him good luck. At least that's what he said in court.

2. Erm, I can only think of one.




*Pro-drug use, collect the E for a power-up.*




*"You have sunk my battleship"*

The controls were fiddly at first, and if you are playing on a standard joystick, then having to reach for the keyboard to drop bombs is severely gimping your chances.

Once I decided to cheat and redefine my controller to a more comfortable layout in an emulator, I found the game far more playable and actually began to enjoy it. At least until level three, which is as far as I can get. I suppose with only six levels, they have to keep the challenge high, but even though I can see myself one day defeating the level three boss, I know for sure that I'll never get as far as level five.

This drops its appeal somewhat and after a while Typhoon becomes a little frustrating. But on the plus side it has a supremely cool title tune (at least on the 128k Spectrum). It's short and repetitive, but it's also the kind of tune that I could just listen to for ages and never get sick of. The sound effects are decent enough as well, but some in-game music would make all the difference.

So, in the final analysis, Typhoon isn't really a bad little shooter. It's just not a great one. **SP**

## The Rating Potato



**VERDICT:** It's OK for a quick blast, but won't hold your attention long.

# BUCK ROGERS - PLANET OF ZOOM

**PUBLISHER:** US GOLD LTD • **YEAR:** 1985 • **MEMORY:** 48K

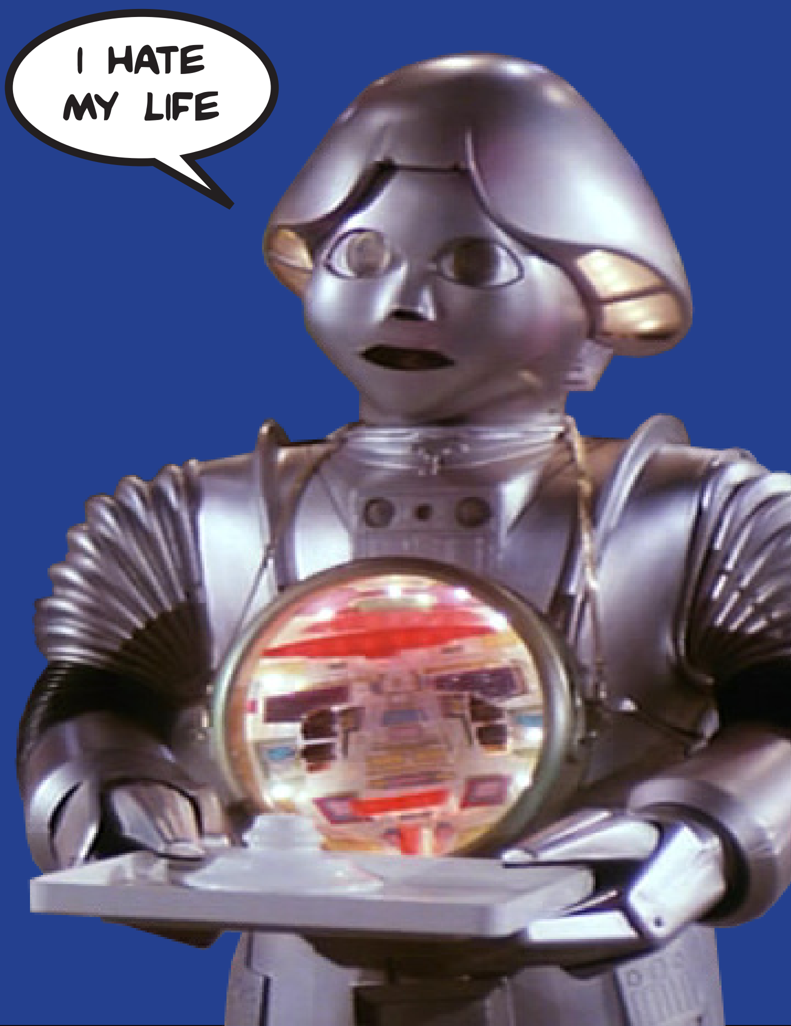



*This is EXACTLY what I imagine the surface of other worlds to look like.*

**Back** in the days when men were real men came the hero that was Buck Rogers. He was cool as a cucumber and a hit with the ladies. But that's all kind of irrelevant because aside from the space setting, this really has very little to do with the titular hero at all.

A conversion of a Sega arcade game (which I knew as Zoom 909), Buck Rogers is one of those semi 3D into-the-screen style shooting games. The next generation of things like Space invaders or Galaga if you like (You don't? Well see if I care). The game sees you flying your spacecraft over the Planet of Zoom - a planet so indescribably garish that all the native inhabitants have gone either blind or mad.

Each level is split into a series of sub-stages. The first few have you navigating through gates, then repeating this process while zapping a series of bouncing aliens and UFOs that love to creep up from behind,



## More Bucks



BUCK MURDOCK
Despite his history, he helps save Ted Striker and the Lunar Shuttle from disaster.



UNCLE BUCK
A slob with a heart, he's Buck Melanoma, Moley Russell's Wart.



BUCKWHEAT
It's American so I have no idea. But Eddie Murphy's parody is pretty funny, so that's good.

then you launch into space where you, um, zap some more UFOs and then zap what is probably the least challenging boss in videogame history (I'm not kidding, you could breathe on this thing and it would explode). In each stage you are set a goal, and you have to destroy a certain number of baddies (or go through gates) to progress to the next.

I used to quite enjoy this game in the arcades. Although a poor man's Space Harrier, it had a certain amount of simple arcade charm to it. Some of that charm is carried through to the Speccy version, but in




*This tripod alien looks quite friendly. Better shoot it, just in case.*



*Space levels are a welcome rest for the eyes.*

## More Rogers



ROGER THE SHRUBBER
He arranges, designs and sells shrubberies. However, recently times are hard.



ROGER MOORE
I say pooh to Connery fanboys, Roger Moore had all the best Bond films.




ROGER DE COURCEY
Safely saucy ventriloquist with a stunning 80s hair and moustache combo.




*This massively challenging boss makes opening your eyes seem difficult.*

many areas it falls short. The graphics are basic, but move smoothly. The planet's surface almost gives a convincing impression of movement by just flashing coloured bars, but you might find it hard to play while wearing sunglasses, which are essential if you want to prevent the migraine-inducing colour scheme from making you throw up onto your TV.

One thing I remember from the arcade was the Star Wars-like trench level, and this is sadly absent from the Spectrum version, and this is one of the areas in which poor Bucky suffers. Although initially fun, the sheer lack of variety soon begins to wear thin and strangely enough, despite my loathing for frustrating games, I actually wish this game was a bit harder. Once you settle in to the rhythm of the game and manage to clear a few levels, it just gets a bit stale. **SP**




*I'm sure psychologists would have something to say about Buck's obsession with giant phalli.*




**VERDICT: Like Ariston, it goes on, and on, and on, and on...**



# CAKE OF THE MONTH

## YUMMY YUMMY YUMMY, I'VE GOT CAKE IN MY TUMMY

Picking a cake can be a difficult task at the best of times, but there is no doubt that this month's choice is truly a heavenly delight amongst its peers. Angel Cake is a true wonder of cake making in so many different ways. It not only has three (count 'em) different coloured layers of tasty sponge, but also separating layers of cream: and all this encompassed in a thin but hard-wearing coat of darker brown sponge for protection.

In the past, Angel Cake was often eaten while sitting cross-legged and watching episodes of Doctor Snuggles on television. But with the rise of computing, the more developed palate has challenged this ideal and you will now find it served mostly whilst taking part in marathon sessions of Firebird Software's *Savage*.





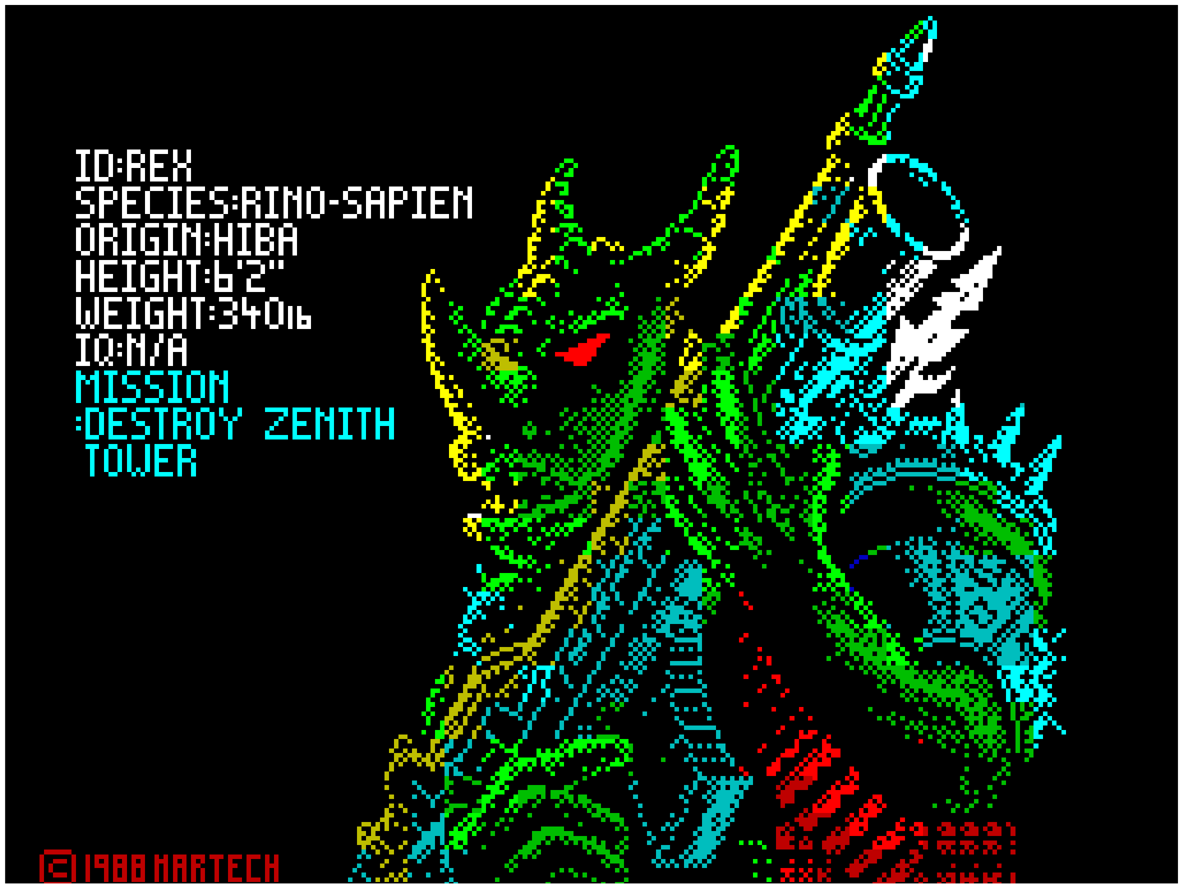

The Angel Cake is the perfect companion to this title as each consist of three distinct, yet comfortingly familiar, sections which are brightly coloured. The cream of the Angel Cake is surely representative of the delicious 48k beeper music that is sandwiched neatly in between the meat (or 'sponge') of the game.

There is a sub-group of Angel Cake enthusiasts that prefer to defy convention and partner their cake with Speccy maze game *Go To Hell*, purely for the incongruity of the whole affair.






3D Starstrike : Realtime Software Ltd : 1984




Rex : Martech : 1988

# KAYLETH

**PUBLISHER:** US GOLD LTD • **YEAR:** 1986 • **MEMORY:** 48K

**You** know, I've always thought I could be one of those people that liked text adventures. You know, the more intellectual gamer that isn't too shy to actually read things between blasting aliens. But the problem is that there is something inherent about the genre that just doesn't sit right. It might be the instant deaths, or possibly the sitting around for hours just thinking because you can't get anywhere. Like vegetarian food, they're a nice idea, but after the initial bite they just end up tasting like ash in your mouth.

So on to Kayleth. Despite having Isaac Asimov's name plastered all over it, it's not actually based on one of his stories at all. A pretty devious move, but you have to give them points for ingenuity. The plot is solid sci-fi fare. The evil Kayleth (whoever or whatever he/she/it is)




*Shouting 'Down Shep' is ineffective against this beast.*




*You think they're ugly, wait till you see your own reflection.*

has enslaved the Zyroneans, using his androids to force them to fetch him some rocks that he's partial to. It's one of these rare mineral deals, just think Unobtanium and you get the idea.

At the very beginning of the game, you find yourself waking up strapped to a conveyor belt which is moving you towards some very dangerous looking metal claws. You don't quite know why you're here or who you are, but it's all jolly exciting stuff. Once you've broken free of your bonds, you pootle around the alien structure and eventually gain access to the planetary surface, where great cities and dark forests await you (why do there always have to be forests?)

The first thing you notice about Kayleth is that every location has a supporting picture. Despite the Speccy's primitive graphics, these pictures are really effective at projecting the image of a futuristic world into your brain and do much to enhance the atmosphere of the game. A few are even animated, which adds that extra bit of polish.

As adventures go, I found it initially quite interesting. As is par for the course with this type of game, I kept getting stuck and ended up wandering around the same locations for ages without progress. But it's always satisfying when you work something out. I'd probably go as far as saying that Kayleth is one of the more enjoyable text adventures I've played on the Speccy.

The only problem really lies with me. After a few hours I just lost interest, as I do with most adventures. Perhaps I'm an action junkie and require progress to be swifter. I don't




*Yes, har har, your slot is empty. Don't be childish.*

like suddenly being killed. I don't like inventory limits that have you worrying that you're having to drop an item that you may need a few hours later into the game. But for those of you into this kind of thing, put it on your list of games to play. Even if you're new to adventures, it's not the worst place to start, as long as you can survive the first screen. **SP**







**VERDICT:** **An imaginative sci-fi romp... if you like that kind of thing.**



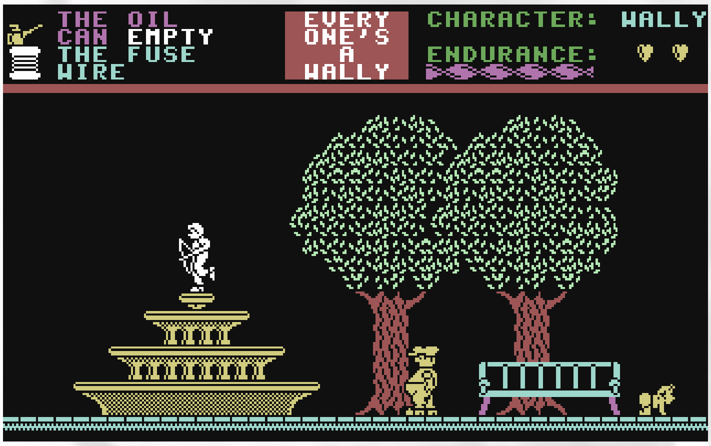
# THE PARSON'S NOSE

*The unpopular fleshy arse end of the magazine*

# 1985

## THE WAR

The battle is still raging in the war of the machines, but it's a telling fact that even major titles like 'Everyone's a Wally' have realised that the only way to make a crappy C64 look half decent is to try and copy the Speccy's supremely advanced graphics. But even then, it lacks the vibrancy and pop of the Spectrum version. And don't give me all that usual crap about colour clash. Colour clash is a FEATURE.




*Even such a direct copy suffers from drab colours.*

## MOVIES

It's looking like a good year for movies. After directing the awesome Alien and Blade Runner, Ridley Scott is preparing to work his magic in the fantasy Legend. Ridley is such a genius, I'm going to bet a year's pocket money that Legend is going to go down as his best movie yet, and become an all-time cinema classic that will redefine the fantasy genre forever. Just you wait and see.

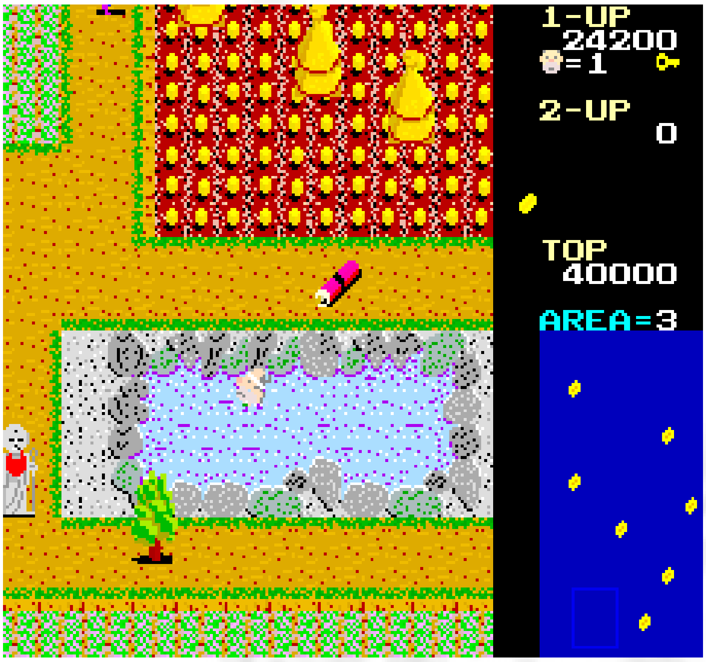


*That's how I feel after a (Tim) Curry.*

On the less interesting side, is some crappy sounding teen romance that tries to fool the cool kids into seeing it by adding some vague science fiction references. It's called 'Back to the Future' which is plainly ridiculous and it's about a kid who goes back to the 50s and has his mum go all soppy over him. Who the hell is interested in the 50s? Sounds dreadful, stars some nobody from American TV, so it's pretty much a guaranteed flop.

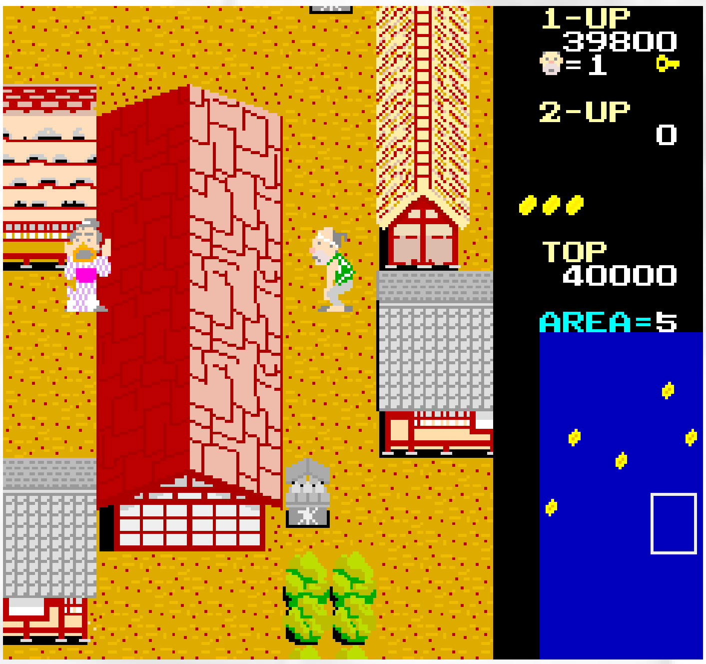
## ARCADES

We like a bit of culture here and Ikki by Sun Electronics is just the thing.




*It's Ikki, but it's not icky (groan).*

You take the role of what looks like a Japanese farmer who must ward off hordes of ninjas, ghosts and other such baddies from his land and surrounding villages. To finish a level, you collect all the coins that can be located on a handy map, and




*Fugly Geisha wants you. Meanwhile, you take a dump in the alley.*

for your defence, you lob some nasty looking sickles - luckily they home in on the nearest enemy. It's quite a fun game, although you have to get uncomfortably close to the edge of the screen to scroll sometimes. But it would make a great candidate for a Speccy conversion. It's sort of a traditional Japanese Commando crossed with Gauntlet!

## MAGAZINES

The May issue of Crash is out, featuring another one of those amazing covers by Oliver Frey - combining all manner of sporting items into a very cool robot. The guy is a genius. Inside, we have reviews of Bruce Lee, Dragontorc and Spy Hunter, as well the wacky comic strip adventures of Jetman. And all this for only 95p!



Step out of the monochrome world

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